



BLIND TEACHERS CONFERENCE



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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
ON
THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND DEVICES USED BY BLIND TEACHERS

Grant School, San Lorenzo Elementary District
San Lorenzo, California

December 3, 1960

Conference Leaders:

Dr. Isabelle L. D. Grant, Resource Teacher*, Washington Irving Jr. H. S.
Los Angeles City Schools, Los Angeles, California

Miss Onvia Ticer, 3rd Grade Teacher, Grant Elementary School
San Lorenzo, California

Conference Advisor:

Dr. Charles Lee, Assistant Superintendent, San Lorenzo Elementary Schools
San Lorenzo, California

Conference Host:

Mr. Omer Weston, Principal, Grant Elementary School
San Lorenzo, California

Registration and Arrangements:

Mrs. Mary Crouch, Secretary, Grant Elementary School
San Lorenzo, California

*A RESOURCE TEACHER is the specially trained teacher in charge of the program in which the blind pupils attend regular classes with the sighted pupils of their own age and grade placement. The pupils return to the so-called Resource or Service Room for such assistance from the RESOURCE TEACHER as will enable them to carry on their work alongside their peers. The Resource Room is equipped with Braille writers, type-writers, tape recorders, raised maps, embossed textbooks, and such other materials as are needed by the pupils in the carrying out of the regular work of the classroom. In California, the RESOURCE TEACHER is required to possess a specific credential comprising twenty-four units of work in fields related to the education of blind children, in addition to a regular teaching credential.

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LIST OF PERSONS ATTENDING CONFERENCE

Grant School, San Lorenzo, California

December 3, 1960

BLIND TEACHERS:

Mrs. Dolores Allado, English, Napa Senior High School, Napa*

Mr. John Bessire, Principal and Teacher, Pacific Christian Academy, Graton

Mr. Frank Budds, Resource, San Mateo Elementary Schools, San Mateo

Mr. William Casey, 5th Grade, Fairmont School, San Lorenzo

Dr. Isabelle L. D. Grant, Resource, Washington Irving Jr. H. S., Los Angeles
City Schools

Mr. Ross Huckins, California School for the Blind, Berkeley

Mr. Phil Mangold, Resource, Marshall School, Castro Valley

Mrs. Sally Mangold, Resource, Marshall School, Castro Valley

Mrs. Angela Marcos, Resource, Main Street School, Santa Maria

Mr. Ray Penix, Resource, Lincoln School, Escondido

Mr. Ben Sanematsu, Resource, Camden High School, Campbell Schools, San Jose

Mr. Neil Shulman, Resource, Village Elementary School, Santa Rosa

Mr. Jack Swanson, 8th Grade, Hawthorne Intermediate School, Hawthorne

Miss Onvia Ticer, 3rd Grade, Grant Elementary School, San Lorenzo

Miss Sibyl Westbrook, Resource, Star King School, Carmichael

BLIND STUDENTS IN TEACHER TRAINING:

Miss Blanche Anderson, San Francisco State College, San Francisco

Miss Konda Atkisson, San Francisco State College, San Francisco

Mr. Arturo Baca, University of California, Berkeley

Mr. Gerry Benjamin, San Jose State, San Jose

Mr. Bob Bitts, College of Pacific, Stockton

Mr. Merritt Brown, San Francisco State College, San Francisco

* All locations are in California unless otherwise noted.

BLIND STUDENTS: (Cont.)

Mr. Richard Cowan, Stanford University, Palo Alto
Miss Vera Gurrola, University of California, Berkeley
Miss Carol Hardacre, Whittier College, Whittier
Miss Ardyth Kenoyer, University of California, Berkeley
Mr. Carl Martin, Chico State College, Chico
Mr. Don Queen, University of California, Berkeley
Mrs. Helen Sedlack, San Francisco State College, San Francisco
Mr. Don Swolgaard, San Francisco State College, San Francisco
Mr. Ron Warner, Southern Oregon College, Ashland, Oregon

PARTIAL LIST OF OBSERVERS:

Mr. Paul D. Ehret, Superintendent, San Lorenzo Elementary Schools, San Lorenzo
Mr. William Dresbach, Curriculum Coordinator, San Lorenzo Schools
Mrs. Olga Frey, Vice Principal, Bohannon School, San Lorenzo
Miss Dorothy Misbach, Consultant in the Education of the Visually Handicapped,
State Department of Education, Sacramento
Mr. Fred Sinclair, Northern California Coordinator in Education of the Visually
Handicapped, State Department of Education, Sacramento
Dr. William T. Ward, Director of Laboratory Experiences, Southern Oregon College,
Ashland, Oregon
Dr. Esther Roossinck, Supervisor of Student Teachers, Alameda State College,
Hayward
Mr. Leslie Cheah, Principal, Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind,
Johore, Malaya
Mrs. Lillian Urwin, Resource Teacher, Pittsburg Unified District, Pittsburg
Mrs. Sally Jones, Teacher, Orientation Center for the Adult Blind, Oakland
Mrs. Betty Brudno, Director, Peninsula Braille Transcribers' Guild, San Mateo
Mrs. Lila Queen, Transcriber, San Mateo
Mrs. Ophelia Theobald, Parent of two blind children

I. MORNING SESSION

In his opening address, Dr. Charles Lee gave a warm welcome to the group of sixty-two which included fifteen blind teachers employed in schools throughout the state of California, fifteen young blind students at different stages in their teacher-training program from California and Oregon Teachers' Colleges, and thirty-two observers from the field of administration, transcription and related interests. Dr. Lee pointed out the need for just such a conference for the purpose of enlightenment of the general public, administrators and other school personnel concerning the blind teacher in the teaching profession. Good teaching is a necessity in our schools, be it done by a blind or sighted teacher. Society is apt to see the handicap first, and the individual and his potential afterwards, when the reverse should be the order. As a case in point, he emphasized the professional and personal contributions which were being made in this district by the blind teacher. He suggested that administrators and personnel directors be made cognizant of the fact that a physical handicap need be no deterrent to good teaching.

As the host principal, Mr. Omer Weston introduced the participants. Each person indicated the position held, its location, and the nature of work he was doing.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

THE BLIND TEACHER WITH A SIGHTED CLASS

Leader, Miss Onvia Ticer, 3rd grade Teacher, Grant Elementary School, San Lorenzo
Consultants, Mrs. Dolores Allado, English Teacher, Napa High School, Napa

Mr. Phil Mangold, Resource Teacher, Marshall Elementary School, Castro
Valley

In her opening remarks, Miss Ticer conveyed the regrets from several blind teachers throughout the state, who were unable to accept the invitation to attend the conference. It is estimated that there are, at present, thirty-five teachers

either in regular classes or in resource classes in this state. Speaking from her own experience, Miss Ticer felt that there was not too much difference between the methods which she used when she had her full sight and those she now uses as a totally blind teacher. A few adaptations were necessary, some changes of emphasis and a few devices introduced, although Miss Ticer favors only a very carefully selected use of "gadgetry". What she teaches and what the children learn are the same as in any other class, but the deviation lies in her handling of materials. The purpose of the conference was the discussion and sharing of ideas for the benefit of all blind teachers and students planning to enter the profession.

A. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Few, indeed, are the changes in the physical set-up of the room; maps, globes, chalkboards, pictures are part of the equipment of every classroom. The blind teacher must familiarize himself with locations, using some marking devices on maps, the Braille writer for notes, the typewriter and the tape recorder. For written work on the chalkboard during arithmetic demonstrations, in order to keep columns straight, one device was shown consisting of nine vertical strings approximately four inches apart, attached to horizontal sticks at the top and bottom of the chalkboard. The bottom stick was not firmly attached and could be moved to the left or the right to place the strings at an angle. This was useful in demonstrating the proper slant of letters in the teaching of handwriting. Much depends on the teacher's own ingenuity. Actual classroom practice tends toward simplification of these and other devices. The point emphasized was that full use is made of the chalkboard in the teaching process. Thus, it becomes essential for all blind teachers to master the handwriting skill and its application in the classroom.

Children with the blind teacher participate in the same way as those in classes with sighted teachers. In addition to his academic responsibilities, the child contributes his share to the expeditious handling of the room activities. The rotation system of job responsibilities has been worked out effectively in one such

class--the purchase and distribution of cafeteria tickets, the physical handling of the daily attendance report for the office, opening and closing the windows, distribution of books, pencils and papers, collecting finished classwork and other general routines necessary for smooth operation of the classroom can easily become the responsibility of the children if properly planned and motivated by the teacher. In this way, the child feels that his participation is necessary to the well being of the classroom.

Discipline is interpreted as self-discipline, self-control and respect for those in the entire group. In this atmosphere, the police-like watchfulness used by many teachers has no place, for true discipline comes from within. In a well organized situation, the teacher's time and energy can be used much more effectively. In such an atmosphere, the teacher is rarely at his desk, but ordinarily in the center of the classroom. Identification of pupils is by name, though in a very short time, the teacher is able to identify voices and locate pupils. In this self-disciplined situation the non-conformist is quickly identified and handled individually by the teacher. The child learns the detail of response. To answer "Here" or "There" means little to the blind teacher, and even less to the inattentive or unobservant child. To learn to be more specific--"To the right", "To the left", "Alongside the desk",--induces thoughtfulness, accuracy and alertness, even consideration for others.

It was the consensus of the participants that the blind teacher must have a carefully organized and well-planned program of work, with every activity evaluated and planned ahead. "More so than with the sighted teacher?" the question was asked. The answer was in the affirmative, verified by statements from those teachers who were blinded and still continued their careers in teaching, that more careful preparation goes into their work now than when they were sighted teachers. Whether the blind teacher was more conscientious, more protective of his job, more anxious regarding tenure was a moot question. Suffice it to say that by and large, the

blind teacher who holds a position is as conscientious as others in the same profession.

Does the teacher discuss his own blindness with the group? The answer was an unqualified "Yes!" The first day the teacher meets with the class, reference is made to the fact that the teacher does not see. Frank and open discussion satisfies the children; they accept. They go even further, for they are children, not obsessed by the stereotypes met with in adults. They realize that sound and touch can, to a great extent, replace sight. So the shuffling of seventy or eighty feet on a sandy, gritty floor is deliberately reduced to a comfortable minimum. The "outside" voice is replaced by the "inside" voice for all must be heard. Absence notes are read to the teacher by the pupil concerned, as a message from his home to his school, for he is a part of both. The teacher later checks and files the notes, telephoning to the home if necessary. Such systematic incidentals are of the highest educational, as well as personal value to the pupil, for school is more than the three R's!

B. CLERICAL OBLIGATIONS

Meeting the requirements of the job is not a matter of 20/20 acuity, but a matter of the personality and ability of the teacher. Attendance is kept with scrupulous accuracy in Braille and transferred to the register by the teacher's personally-employed reader, who may spend that valuable time after school closes reading assignments, posting grades on report cards from the teacher's Braille files. An upper grade student from the local high school, a member of the Future Teachers of America, or a member of the speech or dramatics class, can perform these visual tasks under the supervision of the teacher, assuring accuracy by the necessary checking. The pocket money thus earned is not the only incentive in securing the services of these young students. Collection and return of classroom papers is a matter for organization, by rows if convenient, and filed by rows, the teacher Brailling the name of the pupil with the corrections noted in Braille, for

individual conference with the pupil. Marks have little significance unless explained and suggestions made for improvement. Pupils see the Braille; that is just another medium of communication used by blind persons! Some of the pupils learn to read it visually. Some pupils are even curious enough to try to read it with their fingers. Perhaps the blind boy in the integrated class reads this way. The portable typewriter is indispensable to both teacher and pupil.

C. PLAYGROUND ACTIVITIES

"Be the last to leave the playground" was found to be a valid rule for the blind teacher to follow. Move freely where the children are. By the heightened tone of voice, incipient trouble is quickly detected and treated. "Don't stand on the sidelines; that courts trouble." Children may come running to you, but better to be where the argument over the tether ball is apt to break out. Organize games well ahead. In case of accident, stay with the child and send for school nurse or administrator. Gate guards check pupils leaving or entering the school ground. Student body officers are on hall duty, gate duty and so on. Have these "officers" report to you for your decision and action. The final score--know your children. Know the noisy ones and the quiet ones, who also have to get into the game. Know the quarrelsome and the meek, for both have to be tapered off. Know the extrovert and the introvert; both need to participate. Memorize your spectacle-wearers; they may shun the games, and yet they need them. In other words, whether blind or sighted, it is necessary to organize the groups and know the children.

D. CAFETERIA DUTY

Mr. Weston's story of the substitute who took over cafeteria duty during Miss Ticer's absence is sufficiently comprehensive to dispel any problems arising from the assumption of cafeteria duty by the blind teacher. There was an unusual amount of noise that day. "Miss Jones," said Mary, "I think the children are taking advantage of you because you can see!"

Again, the answer is organization and planning. One effective method was

explained as to how this was accomplished when 150 to 200 children eat at the same time. By the use of one host or hostess at each table, much confusion is eliminated. When entering or leaving the cafeteria, the hosts see that tables are filled or pupils dismissed in order of their location. This responsible assignment is considered a privilege by the older children who help direct the one-way traffic system and supervise the dismissal of those at each table at the end of the lunch period. They replace broken straws or dropped silverware, identify and report accidents with spilled food, and see that the children at each table leave both the table and the floor in a tidy condition.

With such large groups, it was found necessary to use a hand microphone for specific directions from the teacher. In this particular situation, one teacher could adequately supervise the intermediate grade pupils; however, it was found that two teachers were needed on duty at the same time with the younger children.

E. GENERAL AND STANDARDIZED TESTING

The giving of regular subject matter tests by the blind teacher offers no problem. Some teachers use the method of having alternate children take the same test at the same time, or use two forms of the same test which enables children sitting beside each other to be working on different forms.

The teacher has his general test instructions in Braille which he reads to the class and clarification of any point is made at that time. Prior to the scheduled time for the test, the teacher with his sighted reader prepares a tape with each test timed accurately by the stop watch. Then the teacher, in his own voice, on tape, gives the definite instructions to start the test. The tape runs silently for the specific time allowed. At that particular moment, the instructions, "Stop, pencils down," are given. Then the tape recorder is turned off. This procedure continues until all of the tests are finished. In this way, the blind teacher has been able to time each test accurately with a stop watch and eliminate a sighted assistant for that purpose.

II. AFTERNOON SESSION

TOPIC: THE BLIND TEACHER IN THE RESOURCE ROOM

Leader, Dr. Isabelle L. D. Grant, Resource Teacher, Washington Irving Jr. H. S.,
Los Angeles

Consultants, Mrs. Angela Marcos, Resource Teacher, Santa Maria Elementary Schools,
Santa Maria

Mr. Ben Sanematsu, Resource Teacher, Camden High School, Campbell Schools,
San Jose

Mr. Jack Swanson, 8th Grade Teacher, Hawthorne Intermediate School,
Hawthorne

In her opening remarks, Dr. Grant placed emphasis primarily on teacher competence, and only secondarily on the type of work, regular or resource, or on the individual, blind or sighted. As evidence, she recalled discussions of the morning session, actively participated in by teachers in the regular classes as by teachers in the resource rooms. Furthermore, many of the teachers present had had experience as sighted teachers and drew their similarities and comparisons from that experience. She further indicated that it is desirable for blind teachers of sighted children to be aware of the purpose, philosophy, and the methods of functioning of the resource program in order to be able to give some guidance to parents of blind children and to the general public, who would reasonably be expected to associate the blind teacher with some knowledge of the education of blind children.

Dr. Grant drew up a two-point frame of reference in her estimate of the potential of the blind resource teacher.

1. Through his experience, he has had to meet and overcome social, psychological, educational and vocational problems because of his own blindness. In other words, he has a "we" relationship with his pupils, instead of a differentiating "you".

2. The blind Resource Teacher is, at the same time, example and precept to

his pupils. Reference was made to the employment of a blind Resource Teacher by a school district on the basis of the argument that if, other things being equal, we had faith in educating our young blind children to take their place in society, we should be willing to accept him as a teacher if he is duly qualified. With blind children, as with blind adults, the normality of the individual is still subordinated to the "handicap" which is equated with inferiority in the minds of many persons.

With such assets and liabilities, the blind Resource Teacher must, as was pointed out with the blind teacher of sighted children, be particularly well prepared as a teacher. He must have the ability to organize his work well, and must be willing at all times to "go the extra mile."

A. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE IN THE RESOURCE ROOM

Organization of materials and of books, labeling, filing--in short, good housekeeping--is the time and temper saver in the resource room. Office bulletins, reports, pupil personnel cards, and all pertinent data must be accessible. The clerical work involved in the writing of reports, keeping attendance, posting grades and marks on the report cards are the regular "homework" of the blind Resource Teacher as well as of the regular teacher. The employment of help for this purpose is his responsibility. In the junior and senior high schools, and in some intermediate grades, pupils are available as class monitors, receiving school service credit for this work. These monitors read to the blind pupils when the regular assignment is not available in Braille or on record or tape; for example, a newspaper or magazine article.

It was suggested to the conferees that in keeping with the purpose of the conference, discussion of "methods" in the resource room would be minimized. Consequently, such questions as mobility, the use of cane travel, training in listening skills, and oral reading were considered as part of the Resource Teacher's special training in the specialized courses offered in teacher-training colleges.

However, discussion centered around the ability of the blind Resource Teacher to detect posture irregularities, mannerisms and general appearance. Here the blind teacher must be particularly alert, detecting the drooping head by the tonal quality and direction of the voice, observing posture by frequent references to sitting up straight and walking without slouch or slide, both of which are audible, and occasional references to his own mode of dress as a stimulation to the untidy pupil. Above all, there was general agreement on the need for accuracy as well as fluent use of Braille as a medium of the teacher's own reading and writing, coupled with drive and imagination.

B. CONSIDERATIONS IN TEACHER PLACEMENT

There is still a certain degree of hesitancy on the part of personnel directors regarding the blind applicant. Blind applicants must have confidence in their own ability to do the job for which they are applying, based on an adequate background of training, on success in practice teaching and, second, a sincere desire to teach. The teaching profession is not just a "way out" for a job! Furthermore, blindness in itself is no qualification for becoming a teacher. One conferee pointed out, "There is no scarcity of incompetent teachers!"

Administrators and those in charge of recruitment of teachers should be made aware of and be asked to consider well-trained and well-qualified teachers by invitation to observe in classes taught by blind teachers and generally acquaint themselves with the competence of blind persons employed in competitive industry.

The question was raised as to whether only a blind teacher should teach blind children. The strongly voiced opinion of the group was that blindness did not enter into the problem. The question was whether the applicant could do the job or not. The same answer was given to the converse question as to whether only a sighted person should teach blind children. Teaching is something which demands a more basic requirement than sight.

C. ATTITUDE OF FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION TOWARD THE BLIND TEACHER

Although this question had entered into the discussion at several points, further aspects of this acute problem were considered. There were those teachers who are of the opinion that because one can't see, one can't do. Helen Keller said with all truth, "They said it could not be done while it was being done." Or as one blind high school student said of one of her teachers, "She makes me more blind than I am!" "She is a this and a that teacher." Teachers who have these medieval stereotypes regarding blindness should probably be left alone. Educators are, in the main, conservative; they do not readily adopt new ideas. Business and industry cannot afford this luxury, so we find blind persons and, in fact, many more "handicapped" persons taking their places in open competition with the apparently non-handicapped. But, fortunately, the conservative group is now becoming a minority. The feeling was expressed that many administrators and recruitment personnel are willing to listen. Some of these are ex-servicemen, who happened to have escaped the blindness that overtook their buddies, realizing that with rehabilitation and orientation, these physically impaired could take their place in the stream of society again. By appealing to the intellectual integrity of the teacher, one can educate to the point of acceptance just as we find many of our fine sighted teachers in the integrated program actually asking to have blind children assigned to their classes.

D. LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF BLIND TEACHERS

As the possible liability involvement of a school board in case of injury while a blind teacher was on duty was a factor in the employment of a blind teacher, this question came in for much discussion. Two points were made: Administration code 12104 states, "No person otherwise qualified shall be denied the right to receive credentials from the State Board of Education on the ground he is totally or partially blind." In 1945 the change was made in the Health Code to the effect that the visual acuity requirement was deleted from the health form of the teaching credential. It

was pointed out that the granting of a credential in no way guaranteed the job. Local school boards still had the right to refuse to employ the applicant without stating the obvious reason. With regard to the incidence of accident to blind persons, it was noted that, percentage-wise, studies show that there are fewer accidents among blind persons in industry than among their sighted colleagues. One may attribute a low accident rate to selection of the job, but the point was made that the job was not always selected on the basis of safety. The low incidence, it was considered, was due to the care exercised by the blind person in his desire to avoid accidents and to keep on the job. The question was posed as to whether there ever was a test case by which an accident could be attributed to the blindness of the individual. No one knew of such. The opinion was expressed that no parent, suing a school board for injury to a child on the playground, would use the teacher's blindness as the contributing cause of the accident. A case of neglect of duty would be a different problem. Some blind teachers carry insurance for self-protection just as many sighted teachers do. However, seeing that the fear of legal involvement constitutes, in the opinion of the group, one of the reasons for the present unwillingness to employ the blind teacher. It was considered a worthwhile problem for immediate research.

III. SUMMARIZATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the conference was, as the title indicated, the exchange of ideas and devices for blind teachers. Need for such an exchange of thinking had been obvious to individuals for some time. Fifteen teachers and fifteen student teachers, all of them blind, participated, together with thirty-two observers. The discussion of the morning session centered around the blind teacher in the regular class. In the afternoon session, the blind teacher in the resource room was discussed. Questions and discussions took precedence over speeches, which were reduced to a minimum. The sessions were lively, thought-provoking, uninhibited and at times strikingly humorous. Recommendations came from the group assembled. These were:

1. Boards of Education should be encouraged to keep those teachers who had given valuable service to the school district and had become blind. With the necessary training and orientation, Braille reading and writing, mobility and rehabilitation, many of these teachers could continue to give worthwhile service to the schools.

2. Boards of Education should be encouraged to give consideration to the employment of blind teachers who are duly qualified and give promise of good service. Administrators should be encouraged to observe these persons during the course of their training, as well as observe blind teachers already in the teaching field.

3. Short biographies of successful blind teachers should be compiled and distributed to Boards of Education and to the general public.

4. Competence of the highest order should be advocated and maintained. The consideration behind this recommendation was that, although the same standards should apply to blind persons as to sighted persons, in view of the fact that placement is still difficult, only the best possible personnel should consider entrance into the teaching field.

5. A research program should be set up to study such problems as:

- a. Legal aspects and responsibility of Boards of Education in the employment of blind teachers.
- b. Study of methods and devices used by blind teachers and their implementation for regular teaching. For example, in the interpretation and handling of discipline, in the use of listening skills, and in group responsibility.
- c. Improvement of the audio aspects of the audio-visual program in general education.

The conference closed with the question of the "Next Step." The suggestion to form an association of blind teachers to carry out some of these projects was quickly turned down by the group. Blind teachers are, first of all, teachers; blindness is

incidental to the question. It was agreed to call another conference for the discussion of specific problems and needs of blind teachers, and on problems and recommendations enunciated in this conference.

Conference adjourned.

